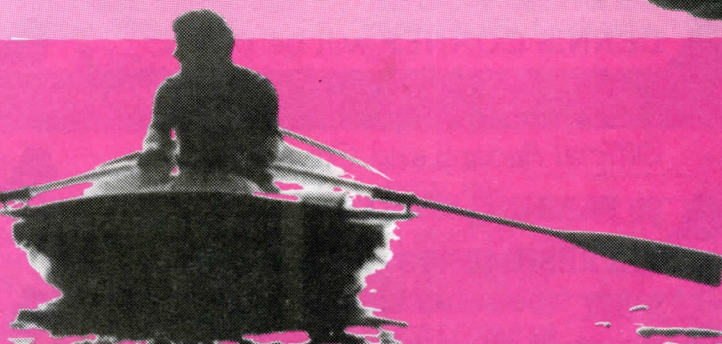


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OCTOBER 1987



By David Poe & Craig Willis

CUEVA VALDEZ

I haven't had a real weekend off since we launched Santana back in February, so a couple of weeks ago when Craig Willis phoned to chat and mentioned that he and his wife, Katie, spend a lot of time in the Channel Islands, a little light popped on over my head. "Gee, Craig," I said, "I've never been to the Channel Islands."

Craig said the right thing, "Why don't you come with us for a weekend?"

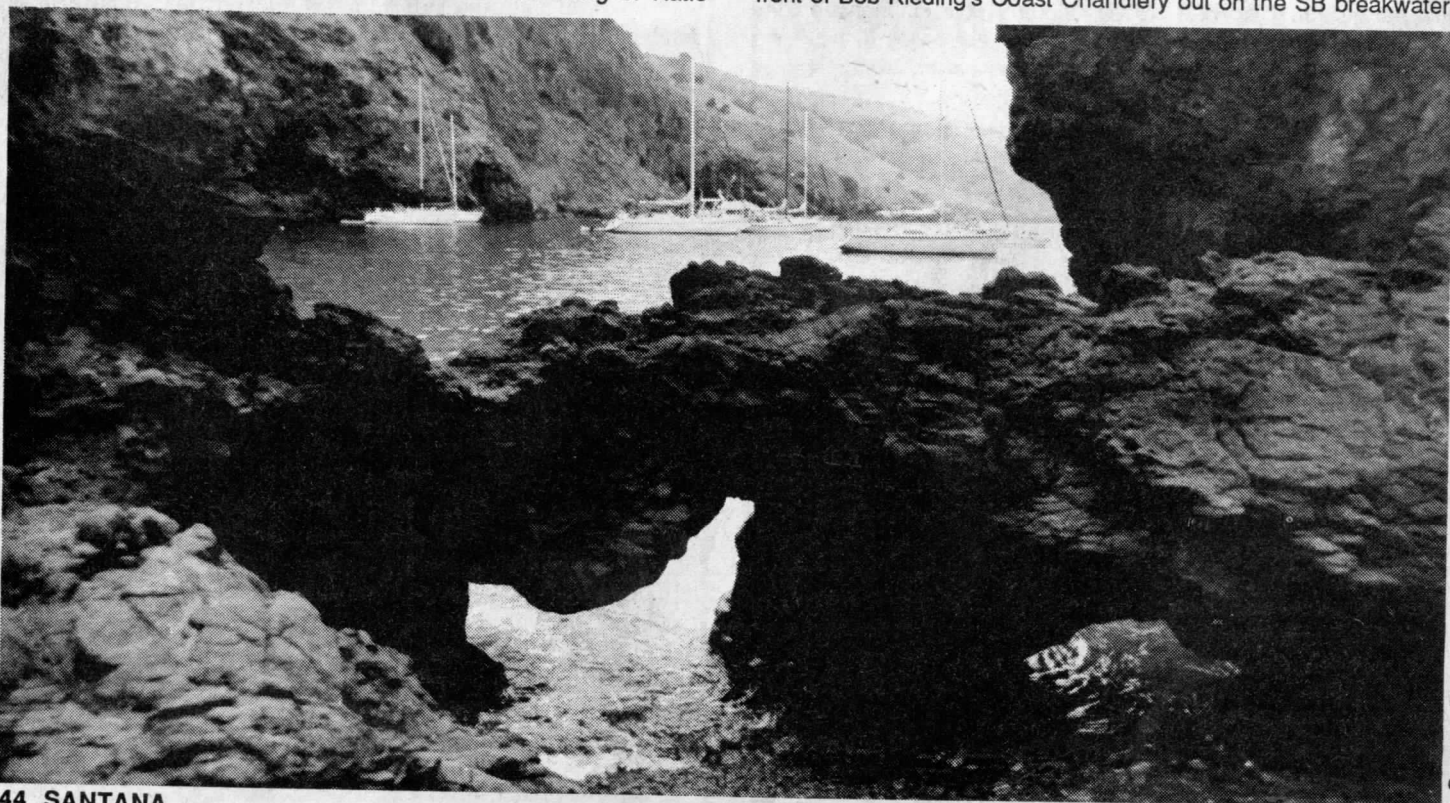
"Gosh, Craig, I thought you'd never ask." I majored in con-jobs in college - that's why I write for a living.

There's another kicker to this. I'd never met Craig or Katie

except on the telephone and in the pages of Craig's California Gunkholing articles. Good grief, I'd just agreed to spend a weekend with two people I didn't know on a thirty-five foot sailboat. What if they were Jesus freaks or didn't drink or swear or were just plain out and out boring? Do you how small a thirty-five foot boat can be if you're on it for a weekend with a non-drinking, bible thumping bore?

* * *

My friend and I drove up to Santa Barbara to meet Craig, Katie and *Delia*, their Cheoy Lee Robb 35. Craig said he'd meet us in front of Bob Kieding's Coast Chandlery out on the SB breakwater.



and went off alone. There were few people awake and the solitude was almost eerie. The cliffs around Cueva Valdez drop sharply into the sea to depths of thirty to fifty feet. Dense forests of kelp rise through the clear water and coasting the dink over these forests was more like flying than floating. Just west of Cueva is a small mouthed cave opening onto the sea. Inside is a large cavern. It's out of sight of the anchored boats in the cove and as I aimed the dink into it I felt as though I was the only human on the planet. It lasted for a few moments, then a man rowing a classic skiff rounded the corner. Richard - I didn't get his last name - was accommodating and joined me,

rowing into the cave. The result is this month's cover image.

East of Cueva are two arched rocks. One is offshore and set at right angles to the shoreline. Rounding it the second arch becomes apparent. Paralleling the cliffs, it looks like the gateway to a fortified castle. Entering the arch in the dink I expected an iron portcullis to slammed down behind me. But, emerging from the rocky "sally port" I found a spectacular grotto surrounded on three sides by sheer escarpments rising to over five hundred feet. There is no landing or beach, but WOW!

Sunday afternoon we were back relaxing on *Delia* and Craig asked if we

had the time to stay another night. "You gotta be kidding, Craig." Santana magazine and the mainland were a thousand miles and an eternity away. We were rewarded! As the sun set it highlighted enormous cumulonimbus clouds building to over twenty thousand feet above the Santa Barbara mountains. By darkness the entire mountain ridge was blazing with lightning. It was part of the weather system that brought the worst fires in California and West Coast history. Ultimately the lightning caused fires would take lives and destroy hundreds of thousands of acres of brush and timber, but Sunday night it was simply awesome natural beauty. In the safety of Cueva Valdez we watching the lightning, the stars and the pulsing luminescence of photoplankton along the anchor lines and trailing the body of the occasional seal streaking through the cove.

There are a hundred stories in the Channel Islands - we'll be back.

IMPORTANT NOTE

Santa Cruz Island is privately owned by the Gherini family and the Santa Cruz Island Company, the latter controlling the central and western portion of the island.

Be aware that Santa Cruz Island is not part of the Channel Islands National Park. Public access is restricted and landing on any portion of the island is forbidden without a Landing Permit, which must be obtained on the mainland. Landing Permits are not issued on the island. You can apply for them as follows:

For the central and western portions of the island -

*Santa Cruz Island Company
515 South Flower Street
Los Angeles, CA 90071
(213) 485-9208*

Most Harbormaster's Offices, yacht clubs and chandlaries also have the applications. An annual fee of \$40 (or \$10 for 30 days) is charged.

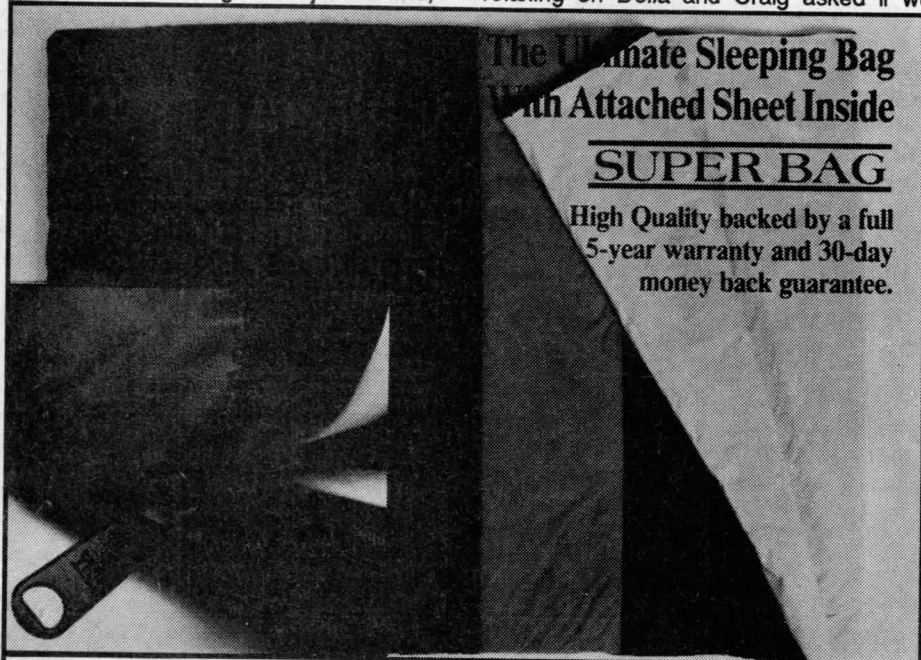
For the eastern part of the island -

*Mr. Francisco Gherini
162 South 'A' Street
Oxnard, CA 93030
(805) 483-8022*

There is no charge, but a stamped, self address envelope must be included.

Allow at least a week to ten days for processing your application.

We would also strongly recommend reading (and taking with you) Brian Fagan's Cruising Guide to California's Channel Islands and buying Ed Winlund's Chart Guide Southern California. Some of Fagan's anchoring, approach instructions and hazard warning might save you and your boat and Winlund's chart marks good fishing, diving and photo locations as well as containing a plethora of valuable info.



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I'd seen a photo of Craig - no problema.

Craig was in front of the chandlery as promised, leaning casually against a railing - a pleasant looking guy about my age. Hey - all right! - Craig has a tattoo of a naked woman on his arm. A sure sign he's not a bible thumper. Two minutes later Katie strolled up. She is a very pretty, 100% Irish strawberry blonde with lots of freckles and a great smile...and a grocery bag with a bottle of wine in it. This was looking like a good weekend! *Delia* is as pretty as Katie - an absolutely pristine woodie that is also their home. *Delia* doesn't have a slip anywhere and Craig and Katie advertise their address as "West Coast". This is a neat threesome.

We took a quick fam trip around *Delia* and cast off. The morning was foggy and a mile off the harbor we owned our private little twilight zone of white and grey, glassy water and low rolling swell. Surreal! Halfway across the channel we were joined by two cavorting humpback whales. Just off our bow they played, apparently in no hurry to go anywhere as they breached and slapped the smooth water with their flukes. Two basking sharks, intent on some destination or another, slipped between us and the whales, apparently oblivious or unconcerned about our presence. Then we got another visitor - almost. A pigeon flew out of the fog, attempted a landing on *Delia*, missed and splashed into the water astern. Pigeons can't take off from the water and fifteen miles from shore this poor little guy was flopping around, flailing his wings helplessly. My friend hates pigeons and Craig seemed of similar mind, but Katie immediately wanted to rescue it. She ordered the boat around and it was pigeon overboard drill. We lost the race to another basking shark and the pigeon joined the food chain.

Cueva Valdez was crowded - if you can call ten boats crowded. It's located on the north side of Santa Cruz Island. Not really a protected harbor, it is more of an indentation in the rugged coast line. It's fairly sheltered from the prevailing westerly swells, but there is always some surge and it would be real dicey in Santana conditions. The cliffs surrounding the cove are abstract sculpture that change dramatically with the angle of the sun. The Channel Islands are actually an extension of the Santa Monica mountains, formed by upthrusting and crinkling of the earth's crust as part of the ongoing collision between the Pacific and Continental tectonic plates. As a result of this slow motion violence the various strata layers are set at abrupt angles and uneven erosion due to the varying geologic composition of the layers has created caves, dramatic overhangs and all manner of abstract shapes. A rocky beach curves around the

Craig. Is this guy walking on water or what?



A yachtie rows his dink out of the beaching cave.

inner side of the cove extending into a cave on the west side. The best dink landing is through an opening in the cave facing the water and onto the beach in the cavern. You can then walk through either of two land entrances to the cave, one opening onto a rocky tidepool area and the second onto the beach itself. At the eastern end of the beach is another cave, so low that it must be crawled through. The opposite end opens into a small ravine with a fresh water stream cascading down it. Scaling the ravine reveals a thirty foot waterfall at the far end where erosion has shaped the walls so they overhang the pool at the base of the fall. The water is cool, pure and tasty. Every tiny niche in the cliffs is occupied by tiny wildflowers. There is a small level area at the base of the falls just large enough for a picnic for two - the perfect place to take a lover.

Saturday night I slept in *Delia's* cockpit under a zillion stars. There isn't any smog over Santa Cruz Island and it was like a night I once spent in the high country above Yosemite. The sky was so clear that you could lay on your back and experience vertigo staring out into a thousand light years of space.

In the morning, I looked over the cockpit combing and watched a huge wild boar patrolling the beach, munching on bits of food tossed overboard from the boats in the cove. I took *Delia's* dink, a nine foot inflatable with a four horse Mariner on it,

Katie goes tidepooling.

